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Along with more than two dozen other Democratic members of the U.S. Congress, Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick and Rep. Harry Mitchell, both of Arizona, are in Israel this week on a fact-finding trip financed by the American Israel Education Fund, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee whose mission is to provide educational programming about the U.S.-Israel relationship.

(A similar six-day trip for Republican members of Congress, which left the U.S. Aug. 3, included no Arizona representatives, according to Darren Mackoff, spokesman for the AIEF.)

In an e-mail to Jewish News, Mackoff wrote that AIEF trips such as this one offer members of Congress "firsthand experience with issues related to American policies in the Middle East. Members are exposed to views across the political spectrum, both Israeli and Arab."

The congressional delegation that includes Kirkpatrick and Mitchell departed for Israel Aug. 8 and is scheduled to return to the United States on Aug. 16.

On Aug. 12, the schedule included a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a meeting with Defense Minister Ehud Barak, as well as a visit to "Gaza overlook," according to Mitchell spokesman Adam Bozzi.